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Gaddafi's Western Gunslingers

A Colorado trial involves attempted murder, Libya and the CIA

The only thing clear about the attempted killing of Faisal Zagallai, a Libyan graduate student at Colorado State University, is that Eugene Tafoya, the beefy ex-Green Beret who shot him last year, was not simply acting on his own. Thus Tafoya went on trial last week not only for attempted murder but also for conspiracy, although the prosecution is not yet sure who his co-conspirators were. Was he employed by Edwin Wilson, the former CIA agent who is now a fugitive in Tripoli arranging mercenary support for the Libyan armed forces? Was the murder attempt ordered directly by the Libyan government? Did Tafoya have any real connection to the CIA, as he claims, or only with renegade ex-CIA agent Wilson? As these questions are explored at Fort Collins, Colo., during Tafoya's trial, which could last a month, authorities hope, or perhaps fear, that some light will be shed on the mysterious web spun by Wilson that entangles former CIA officials and Western soldiers of fortune who are giving support to the radical government of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Zagallai, 35, the son of a former mayor of Tripoli, originally came to the U.S. on a scholarship provided by the Gaddafi regime. But he soon soured on the dictator's repressive policies and became a leader of the anti-Gaddafi dissidents in the U.S., and had been warned by the FBI that he was a prime assassination target. Fortunately for him, the man who called at his apartment pretending to be a corporate recruiter bungled the job. Tafoya, 47, a 23-year veteran of the Army and the Marines, who fought in Viet Nam, fired at Zagallai at least twice at pointblank range but succeeded only in blinding him in one eye. Four months later, the .22-cal. pistol used in the attack was found near by and was easily traced to Tafoya, who was arrested at his home in Truth or Consequences, N. Mex., in April. Tafoya has variously claimed that he acted in self-defense after Zagallai pulled his own gun, and that he was on a secret mission for the CIA to warn Zagallai to tone down his criticism of Israel. As Tafoya tells it, he was at that time a kind of double agent, working for Wilson even while spying on him for the CIA. The agency denies that Tafoya was in its employ.

His connection with Wilson is another matter. After the shooting, Tafoya lived for three weeks at a 17th century farm estate in southern England owned by Wilson. His personal papers include the private telephone and telex numbers for Wilson in Tripoli, as well as notes from what appear to be conversations with him.

ing to one of Wilson's former business associates. In a tape recording seized at Tafoya's house, a man believed to be Tafoya tells a phone caller that he was responsible for the bombing and is available for other jobs: "Do you know something that should quit breathing permanent?" Authorities have identified the man who spoke to as James Clinton Dean, a former Green Beret.

Wilson is a former covert operative for the CIA who helped organize the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion by anti-Castro Cubans in 1961. He officially left the Government in 1976, when the naval intelligence

saying that Americans have been sustaining Gaddafi's yearlong intervention into neighboring Chad.



Eugene Tafoya and John Stubbs, inset

A web of violence and intrigue.



branch for which he was working, known as Task Force 157, was being disbanded by Navy Rear Admiral Bobby Inman. Wilson tried to persuade Inman to save Task Force 157 by offering what Inman took to be a bribe; the admiral, offended, immediately decided to abolish the operation. In 1980 Wilson was indicted on charges of illegally shipping explosives to Libya. He has been a fugitive, mainly in Tripoli, since then. In a series of articles over the past five months, the New York Times has described how Wilson and former CIA Colleague Frank Terpil have supplied sophisticated technology and trained personnel to the Libyan armed forces. Much of their business

John Anthony Stubbs, a British pilot who worked for Wilson until he was asked to deliver arms to a Chad airfield under siege, told TIME last week that as many as 45 Americans have also been recruited to help train Palestine Liberation Organization terrorists in Libya. According to Stubbs, the training operation is based in Kufra, about 800 miles south of Tripoli, and run by former U.S. Marine Corps Pilot Robert Hitchman, who once worked for the CIA-financed company Air America and now lives in an apartment in Wilson's villa. Says Stubbs: "I met Hitchman in Saigon in 1972. I never knew exactly which side he was working for. When I was in Libya, we used to play chess at Wilson's villa. He runs the P.L.O. helicopter training for the Libyan government, and he flies them himself. The Americans he hires are mainly Viet Nam veterans, and they work for about \$4,000 a month."

When testimony gets under way in the heavily guarded courtroom in Fort Collins, a central question will be whether Libya's World Revolutionary Committee was telling the truth when it initially claimed to have ordered the murder of Faisal Zagallai. If it did, it probably acted through Wilson. This possibility has spurred the Justice Department, CIA and FBI to pursue more aggressively their investigation of the former operative's empire. An interagency task force has been set up to coordinate the case, and the House Intelligence Committee will begin public hearings by the end of the year. The result may be a fuller understanding of the old-boy dealings between present and former intelligence agents. There is a growing suspicion, as well, that close scrutiny of Wilson's affairs will turn up embarrassing connections with high officials, both in the U.S. and abroad, who may have participated in business deals with the entrepreneur in Tripoli.

—By Walter Isaacson.